

It's a poor science that would hide from us the great, deep, sacred infinitude of Nescience, whither we can never penetrate, on which all science swims as mere superficial film.

—*Carlyle.*

The two *batalões* turned from the open waters of the lower Tapajos River into the *igarapé*, the lily-smothered shallows that often mark an Indian settlement in the jungles of Brazil. One of the two half-breed rubber-gatherers suddenly stopped his *batalõe* by thrusting a paddle against a giant clump of lilies. In a corruption of the Tupi dialect, he called over to the white man occupying the other frail craft.

Fate's retribution was adequate. There emerged a rat with a man's head and face.

"We dare go no farther, master. The country of the Ungapuks is bewitched. It is too dangerous."

Fearfully he stared over his shoulder toward a 296 spot in the slimy water where a dim bulk moved, which was only an alligator hunting for his breakfast.

Hale Oakham, as long and lanky and level-eyed as Charles Lindbergh, ran despairing fingers through his damp hair and groaned.

“But how can I find this jungle village without a guide?”

The *caboclo* shrugged. “The village will find you. It is bewitched, master. But you will soon see the path through the *matto*.”

“Can’t you stay by me until time to land? I don’t like the looks of these alligators.”

“It is better for a white man to face an alligator than for a *caboclo* to face an Ungapuk. Once they used to kill and eat us for our strength. Now—” Again his shrug was eloquent.

“Now?” Hale prompted impatiently.

“The white god who put a spell on these one-time cannibals will bewitch us and make us wash and rejoice when it is time to die.”

He shuddered and spat at a cayman that was lumbering away from his *batalõe*.

Hale Oakham laughed, a hearty boyish laugh for a rather learned young professor.

“Is that all they do to you?” he asked.

“No. All who enter this magic *matto* die soon, rejoicing. Before the last breath comes, it is said their bodies turn into a handful of silver dust—poof!—like that.” He snapped his dirty fingers. “Then the life that leaves them goes into rocks that walk.”

Hale sighed resignedly. There wasn’t any use to argue.

“Unload your *batalõe*,” he ordered testily, “and get your filthy carcasses away.”

The half-breeds obeyed readily. As the departing *batalõe* turned from the *igarapé* into the open water of the river, the young man repressed a sudden lifting of his scalp. He was in for it now!

His long body sprawled out in the *batalõe*, he paddled about aimlessly for several minutes until he found an aisle through the jungle—the path that led to the jungle village which he was visiting in the name of science, and for a certain award.

Before plunging into that waiting tangle where life and death carried on a visible, unceasing struggle, he hesitated. Instinctively he shrank from losing himself in that mad green world.

He had first heard of the Ungapuks at the convention of the Nescience Club in New York, that body of scientists, near-scientists and adventurers linked together for the purpose of awarding the yearly Woolman prizes for the most spectacular addition of

empiric facts to various branches of science. One of the members of the club, an explorer, had told a wild yarn about a tribe of Brazilian Indians, headed by Sir Basil Addington, an English scientist, who was conducting secret experiments in biochemistry in his jungle laboratory. The explorer had said that the scientist, half-crazed by a powerful narcotic, had seemingly discovered some secret of life which enabled him to produce monsters in his laboratory and to change the physical characteristics of the Ungapuk Indians, who, in five years, had been transformed from cannibals into cultured men and women.

And now Hale Oakham, hoping to win one of the Woolman prizes, was here in the country of the Ungapuks, entering the jungle path that lead to the unknown.

Fifty feet from the *igarapé*, the path curved sharply away from a giant tree. Hale approached the bend with his hand on his gun. Just before he reached it, he stopped suddenly to listen.

A woman's voice had suddenly broken forth in a wild, incredibly sweet song. Hale stood entranced, drinking in the heady sounds that stirred his emotions like *masata*, the 297 jungle intoxicant. The singer approached the bend in the path, while the young man waited eagerly.

The first sight of her made him gasp. He had expected to see an Indian girl. No sane traveler would imagine a white woman in the Amazon jungle, with skin as amazingly pale as the great, fleshy victoria regia lilies in the *igarapé*.

When she saw Hale, she stopped instantly. With a quick, practiced twist, she reached for the bow flung across her shoulders and fitted a barbed arrow to the string.

She was a beautiful barbarian, standing quivering before him. In the thick dull gold braids hanging over her bare shoulders flamed two enormous scarlet flowers, no redder than her own lips pouted in alarm. There was a savage brevity to her clothing, which consisted only of a short skirt of rough native grass

and breastplates of beaten gold, held in place by strings of colored seeds.

The girl held out an imperious hand and, in perfect English, said:

“Go back!”

Hale drew his long body up to its slim height, folded his arms, and gave her his most winning smile. His insolence added to his wholesome good looks.

“Why?” he exclaimed. “I’ve come a couple of thousand miles to call on you.”

He saw that the eyes which held his levelly were pure and limpid, and of an astonishing orchid-blue.

“Who are you?” Her throaty, vibrant voice was a thing of the flesh, whipping Hale’s senses to sudden madness.

“I’m Hale Oakham,” he said, a little tremulously, “a lone, would-be scientist knocking about the jungle. Won’t you tell me your name?”

She nodded gravely. “I am Aña. I, too, am white.” Her rich voice was quietly proud. “Come; I’ll see if Aimu will receive you.”

With surprising, childlike trust, she held out her little hand to him. The gesture was so delightfully natural that Hale, grinning boyishly, took her hand and held it as they walked down the jungle path.

“Sing for me,” he demanded abruptly. “Sing the song you sang just now.”

“That?” asked the girl, turning the virgin-blue fire of her eyes on him. “That was my death-song that I practice each day. Perhaps soon I shall be released from this.” She passed her hands over her beautiful, half-clothed body.

Hale’s warm glance swept over her. “Do you want to die?”



“Yes; don’t you? But you do not, or you would not have retreated from my poisoned arrow.”

“No, Aña; I want to live.”

“To live—and be a slave of *this*?” Again her hand went over her slim body. “A slave of a pile of flesh that you must feed and protect from the agonies that attack it on every side? Bah! But I am hoping that my turn will come next.”

“Your turn for what, Aña?”

“To enter the Room of Release. Perhaps, if Aimu approves of you, you, too, may taste of death.” Her gentle smile was beatific.

“Do you speak of Sir Basil Addington?”

“He was called that once, before he came to us. Now he has no name. We can find none holy enough for him; and so we call him Aimu, which means good friend.” Her beautiful face was sweet with reverence.

And now, in the distance, Hale saw that the path led into a large clearing. He slowed his pace, for he wanted to know this lovely girl better before he joined the Ungapuks.

“Who are you, Aña?” he asked suddenly, bending closer to the crinkled, dull-gold hair.

“I am Aña, a white woman.” She looked at him frankly.

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“But who are your parents, and how did you get among the Ungapuks?”

Aña’s red lips curved into a dewy smile. “I thought all white men were wise, like Aimu. But you are stupid. How do you think a white woman could appear in a tribe of Indians who live in the jungle, many weeks’ journey from what you call civilization?”

Hale looked a little blank and more than a little disconcerted.

“I suppose I am stupid,” he said dryly. “But tell me, Aña, how did you get here?”

“Why,” she exclaimed, “he made me!”

“Made you? Good Lord! What do you mean?”

“Just what I said, Hale Oakham. If he can take a few grains of dust and make a shoot that will grow into a giant tree like yonder monster itauba, don’t you think he can create a small white girl like me?” Her orchid-blue eyes glowed innocently into his.

The eager questions that he would have asked froze upon his lips, for a party of Indians approached.

The six nearly naked red men came close and surveyed him, toying nervously with their primitive, feather-decorated weapons.

A tall, handsome young fellow who possessed something of the picturesque perfection of the North American plains’ Indian stepped forward and, in perfect English, said:

“Good morning, white stranger. What is it you wish of the Ungapuks?”

“I came to see your white *cacique*,” said Hale.

“Aimu? What is it you wish of Aimu? He is ours, white stranger.”

“Yes, he is yours. I come as a friend, perhaps to help him in his great work.”

“Perhaps!” The young Indian folded his bronze, muscular arms over his broad chest and continued his cool survey of Hale. “White men before you have come: spies and thieves. Some we poisoned with curari. Others Aimu took into the Room of Release.”

He turned to Aña, who was still standing by Hale, and his expression softened.

“What shall we do with him, Aña?” he asked the question, a fleeting look of hunger swept his fine, flashing eyes.

Aña flushed beautifully, and, moving closer to Hale, with an impulsive, almost childish gesture, slipped her arm through his.

“Let us take him to our village, Unani Assu!” she suggested. “I like him.”

It was Hale’s turn to flush, which he did like a schoolboy.

Unani Assu’s brows drew together in a scowl. The hand holding his blow-pipe jerked convulsively.

“Aña! Come away!” he growled. “You mustn’t touch a stranger!”

Aña’s blue eyes stretched with astonishment. “But I like to touch him, Unani Assu!”

The tall Indian, with a half comical gesture of despair, said:

“Don’t misunderstand her, stranger. She is young, very young, ah! And she has known only the reborn men of the Ungapuks.”

He stepped firmly over to Aña, and, taking the girl by the arm, drew her away.

“Run ahead,” he commanded, “and tell Aimu that we come.”

Aña, her feathered bamboo anklets clicking together, sped away.

Unani Assu bowed courteously to Hale.

“Come, stranger. If you are an enemy, it is you who must fear.” He motioned for him to proceed down the jungle path.

The path ended at a clearing studded with *moloccas*, the Indian grass huts made of plaited straw.

Altogether the scene was peaceful and sane and far removed from the strange tales that Hale had heard concerning the Ungapuks.

Hale was conducted to a long, low stone building, where, in the doorway, 299 stood a tall and emaciated white man.

“Aimu!” said the Indians reverently, and bowed themselves.

Over the bare, brown backs, the white man looked at Hale.

“Sir Basil Addington?” asked the young man.

“Yes. You are welcome. Come in.”

Hale entered the building.

He was in a book-filled study, furnished with hand-made chairs and a desk. Sir Basil asked him to be seated. He offered the young man long, brown native cigarettes and a very good drink made from yucca.

After several minutes of conversation, Sir Basil suddenly changed his manner.

“And now,” he shot out, eyeing the young man through narrowed lids, “will you please state the purpose of this visit?”

Hale looked squarely at his questioner. “Frankly, Sir Basil, I have called on you because I am so intensely interested in your work among the Ungapuks that I wish to offer my services.”

He gave in detail his family history, his education, and his experience as a teacher and a scientist.

Sir Basil tapped his teeth thoughtfully with a pencil.

“But why do you think you can be of assistance to me?”

“That, of course, is for you to decide.”

Hale thought that the scientist looked like a huge, starved crow in his loose-fitting coat. He was so



fleshless that, when the light fell strongly on his face as it now did, the bones of his head and hands showed through the skin with horrible clearness.

Hale, under Sir Basil's scrutiny, decided instantly that he did not like him.

"I need a helper," the scientist went on, with the air of talking to himself. "A white assistant who neither loves nor fears me. Unani Assu is good enough in his way, but I need a helper who has had technical training." Suddenly he wheeled on Hale and asked sharply, "How are your nerves, young man?"

Hale started, but managed to answer calmly.

"Excellent. My war record isn't half bad, and that was surely backed with good nerves."

"And you say you have no close relatives, no ties of any sort to interfere with work that is dangerous—and something else?"

"Not a soul would care if I passed out to-day, Sir Basil."

“Good! And now tell me this: are you one of those scientists whose minds are so mechanical, so mathematically made, as it were, that your entire outlook on science is based on old, established beliefs, or do you belong to that rare but modern type of trained thinker and dreamer who refuse to permit yesterday’s convictions to influence to-day’s visions?”

Hale smiled quietly. “I recently lost my chair in a famous university because of my so-called unscientific teachings regarding ether-drift.”

Expressing himself in purely scientific terms, he went into an elaboration of his revolutionary theory. When he had finished, Sir Basil reached out his clawlike hand to him.

“Good!” he approved. “You have dared to think originally. Now listen to my theory of mind-electrons which has grown into the established fact that I have discovered the secret of life and death.”

The long, thin hands reached into a pocket for a box of pills. He swallowed one greedily, and immediately his emaciated face seemed charged with new virility.

He spoke out suddenly. "Our world, you know, is made up of three powers: matter, energy and what you call life. I might really say that there are but two powers, for matter, in its last analysis, is a form of energy. And what is life? You can't call it a form of energy, for every inorganic atom has 300 energy without having life. Life, Mr. Oakham, is mind or consciousness."

He began pacing the floor restlessly. "Everything that lives has this consciousness, and I say this in defiance of some fixed scientific views. The amoeba in a stagnant pool, a thallophyte on a bit of old bread, any of the myriads of trees and plants that you see in the jungle all have consciousness as well as you. And why?"

He brought his fist down upon the table. "Because they issue from the same source as you and I, the almighty mind, eternal, indestructible, which has permitted itself to be enslaved by matter. You are

Hale Oakham. I am Basil Addington, yet we are one and the same. Let me illustrate.”

He seized a glass and poured it full of *masata*. “Look! Two portions of *masata*. But I pour what is in the glass back into the bottle. The molecules cohere and the two portions become one again. Some day you and I—our individual consciousnesses—will flow back to the Whole. That sounds mystical, but listen.

“We scientists hold that the electron explains nearly all the physical and chemical phenomena. I go further and say that it explains *all*. Matter, electricity, light, heat, magnetism—all can be reduced to the ultimate unit. So, Mr. Oakham, I am going to make clear to you how life itself is electronic.”

His long finger touched Hale’s arm. “You, I, yonder mosquito on your sleeve, even one of the germs that is causing my malaria, all being individual living things, are the ultimate units of what I shall personify as the Mind. When I say *you* I do not speak of that mound of flesh in which you exist, and which can be reduced to the same familiar basic elements and

compounds as make up inorganic structures; I speak of your mind, your consciousness—for that is the real you. Are you following me?”

“Perfectly, Sir Basil.” Hale reached for another drink. “But do you mean to say that you and I are no more than a mosquito, a malaria protozoan, or even one of those trees in the jungle?”

Sir Basil’s dry skin slipped back into a long smile. “Startling, isn’t it? You, I, and all other living organisms are nothing but matter, energy and consciousness. You and I have a larger share of consciousness, because our organic structure permits the mind-electrons greater freedom over the matter than composes our bodies. We are more acutely aware of the universe about us, have a greater facility for enjoyment and suffering, a more intricate brain and nervous system. Yet when our bodies die and our consciousness is released, the mind-electrons enslaved by our atoms go back to the elemental Whole. This holds good for the protozoan, the tree, the man—for all things that live.”

Hale was drinking again. "You mean, Sir Basil, that there is a sort of war waged against what you personify as the Mind by matter; that matter is constantly seeking to enslave mind-electrons, so that it may become an organism which, for awhile, may enjoy what we call life?"

Sir Basil pushed back his tufted hair and looked happy. "Yes! And it's Nature's supreme blunder! In the end, the Mind always conquers and gains its release, yet the eternal chain of enslavement goes on and on, and will continue to go on as long as there is a living organism in the world to bind mind to matter."

Hale was excited now, as much from the fiery intoxicant as from the scientist's weird revelation. "I get you," he said, rather inelegantly for a professor. "You mean that if every living thing in the world should pass out, every man, every plant, every animal, even down to microscopic infusoria, the Mind would collect all its electrons, and through some more jealous law of, er, cohesion hold these electrons inviolate from matter and energy?"

“Right! And again, as in the beginning, the Mind would rule supreme. By what I have proved, you and I and all other creatures that now have life may, as separate unfleshed electrons, enjoy eternal consciousness as a part of the Mind.” A new passion leaped to his dark eyes. “When I have finished my mission, no more need we be slaves of the dust, subject to all the frightful sufferings of this dunghill of flesh.”

He brought his fist down upon his skinny leg with a resounding blow.

“But you cannot reduce your theory to fact, Sir Basil!”

“No?” Again came that frightful grin to his cadaverous face. “Can you withstand shock?”

“If you mean shock to the eye, let me remind you that I served two years in the big fight.”

“Then come to my laboratory. Better take another drink.”

While Hale helped himself again from the *masata* bottle, Sir Basil swallowed another pellet.

Then the two went into the adjoining apartment.

Sir Basil, his hand over the doorknob, paused.

“Before we go in,” he said, “I want you to remember that we call natural that which is characteristic of the physical world. Everything alive in this laboratory was produced by nature. I merely made available the materials, or, rather, I made the conditions under which matter was able to enslave mind-electrons.”

He opened the door, slipped his body through, and, with his ugly, teeth-revealing grin, gestured for Hale to follow him.

Hale steeled himself and looked around half fearfully. The first glance took in a large and well-equipped laboratory, somewhat fetid with animal odors. The second lingered here and there on cages, aquariums,



incubators, and other containers where creatures moved.

Suddenly, as something scuttled across the floor and disappeared into a hole in the wall, Hale cried out and covered his eyes with a hand.

Sir Basil laughed aloud. “Why didn’t you examine it closer?”

Hale looked nauseated. “My God, Sir Basil! A rat with a man’s head and face!”

Sir Basil’s voice was sharp, decisive. “Before you leave this laboratory, you’re going to come out of your foolish belief that man is a creature apart from other living organisms. You—the conscious you—is no greater, no more important in the final balance than the spark of consciousness in that rat. When your body and the rat’s body give up their atoms to nature’s laboratory, the little enslaved mind-electron that is you and the one that is the rat will be identical.”

Again Hale shivered and turned away from that cold, too-thin face.

The scientist was speaking. "Step around to all those cages and pens. I want you to see all my slaves of the dust."

But long before Hale had encircled the room, he was so disturbed at what he saw that he could scarcely complete his frightful inspection. In every enclosure he viewed a monstrosity that in some way resembled a human. Every reptile, every insect, every queer, misshapen animal not only looked human in some shocking manner, but also seemed to possess human characteristics. It seemed as though some demented creator with a perverted sense of humor had attempted to mock man by calling forth monsters in his image.

At last the young man cried out: "How did you breed these freaks?"

"They are not freaks, and I did not breed them. They are nature's parentless products whose basic

elements were brought together in this laboratory, and, by a scientific reproduction of the functions of creation, endowed with the life principle, which is merely 302 mind-electrons." He smoothed his long tuft of hair nervously. "Would you like to see how life springs from a wedding of matter, energy, and consciousness?"

"I suspect I can stand anything now," Hale admitted.

"Then come and peep into a very remarkable group of apparatus I have developed, where you can watch atoms building molecules and molecules building living organisms."

"You say I can see atoms?"

"Not directly, of course. The light waves will forever prevent us from actually seeing the atom. But I have perfected a system of photography which magnifies particles smaller than light waves, and, separating their images from the light waves, renders detail clear in the moving pictures."

He went to a huge machine or series of machines which took up all the center floor space of the laboratory, where he busied himself in an intricate network of wires, mirrors, electrodes, ray projectors, and traveling metal compartments. Presently he called out to Hale.

“Let me remind you, Oakham, that while any scientist can break up any of the various proteid molecules which are the basis of all living cells, animal and vegetable, no scientist before me has been able to compound the atoms and build them into a proteid molecule.”

He bared his teeth in the smile that Hale hated.

“I am proud to tell you that the proteid molecule can be built up only when the third element of nature’s trinity is added—the mind-electron. I have found a means of capturing the mind-electron and of bringing it in contact with proteid elements. And now it is possible to bring forth life in the laboratory. Come closer and watch proteid forming protoplasm, protoplasm forming a cell, and the cell evolving into—

well, what do you want, an animal, plant, or an insect?”

Hale had fallen under the scientist’s spell. He did not feel foolish when he said:

“Let’s have a rat!”

Hale became so absorbed in the wonders of the laboratory that when lunch time came, Sir Basil had food brought to them. While they were eating a very good vegetable stew, farina, and luscious tropical fruits, a sudden, agonized scream rang out, followed by other screams and wails.

Sir Basil opened the door and looked out. Aña came running forward. Her blue eyes were flooded with tears.

“Oh, Aimu!” she moaned. “A tree fell on Unani Assu.”

She buried her beautiful face in her hands and sobbed aloud.

Sir Basil frowned heavily.

“I can’t lose Unani Assu yet,” he declared. “He is a wonderful help around the laboratory. Is he dead?”

“No. We should rejoice if his time of release had come. But his legs, Aimu! No one wants to suffer and be crippled.”

Even in her distress, the girl’s voice was rich and vibrant, and every tone moved Hale curiously.

“Hurry!” cried the scientist. “Have them bring him here before he dies.”

The girl leaped to her feet and sped away.

“Come, Oakham,” continued Sir Basil. “Here is a rare opportunity for you to see how completely I have mastered the laws that govern organic matter. Help me prepare.”

For several minutes, Hale worked under the scientist’s sharply spoken directions. By the time the

injured man was brought to the laboratory, Sir Basil was ready for him.

Unani Assu was still conscious, but his pale face indicated that he had lost much blood. When the improvised stretcher was lowered to the floor, Sir Basil sent all the Indians away.

Unani Assu opened his eyes and called feebly, "Aña!"

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"Be still!" ordered Sir Basil. "Aña is not here."

"Please!" gasped the dying man. "I want her—my Aña!"

Sir Basil sucked in his breath sharply. "What's this? Have you been making love to Aña again, after my warning to you?"

The sufferer stirred uneasily. "No!" he panted. "But perhaps my hour of release has come, and I want to look at her—once more."

The scientist smiled unpleasantly as he eyed the magnificent body which looked like a broken statue in bronze.

“Some human characteristics are strange,” he muttered. “In spite of everything I do, this fellow continues to love Aña: Aña whom I intend for myself.”

He stepped to the apparatus and swiftly changed one of the adjustments.

“Perhaps,” he resumed, with a gleam in his eyes that chilled Hale, “this will forever cure him.”

In another moment, the still, half-dead body was lifted and gently slipped into a compartment.

Before Hale’s horrified gaze fastened on the eye-piece which revealed moving pictures of every process that went on within, Unani Assu’s body was reduced almost instantly to a fine, silvery dust.

“Good God!” he cried. “You have killed him.”



The scientist's teeth showed in his wide smile. "Think so? Does a woman destroy a dress when she rips it up to make it over?"

"Do you mean me to understand that you can reduce a living body to its basic elements and then rebuild these elements into a remade man?"

"Watch!" warned the scientist.

Hale looked again and saw the silver dust that was once a living body being whirled into a tiny, grublike thing. He saw the grub expand into an embryo, and the embryo develop into a foetus. From now on the development was slower, and he often stopped to talk with Sir Basil.

Once he asked: "If this man had died naturally, could you have brought him back to life?"

Sir Basil shook his head. "No. When once the mind-electron is completely freed from its enslavement by matter, it is forever beyond recall by the body it has just vacated. Like atomic electrons, whose

equilibrium disturbed break away from their planetary system and go dashing off into space, only to be drawn into another planetary system, the mind-electron may be enslaved almost immediately by extraneous matter. Had Unani Assu died, his liberated mind-electron might at once have been captured by a jungle flower going to seed. Immediately a new seed would be started. And now the former Unani Assu would be a seed of a jungle flower, later to find new life as a plant.”

Suddenly the scientist threw up his hand and cried: “You see? The Mind will be eternally enslaved as long as there is life! Oh, for the time of deliverance!” He gazed fanatically into space, as though he dreamed magnificently.

Hale observed him thoughtfully. When that great brain weakened, the consequences would be frightful.

Sir Basil, as though he had made a sudden decision, went over to that part of his machine which he called the molecule-disintegrator.

“Oakham!” he called out. “I have taken you partly into my confidence. Now I want to show you something. Come here.”

Hale obeyed with misgivings. The scientist pointed out the window to a group of Indians, anxious relatives of Unani Assu.

“Watch!” he ordered.

Turning one of the projectors on the machine toward the window, he sighted carefully and pressed a button.

Immediately one of the Indians fell to the ground and struggled. His companions 304 began dancing around him in evident joy. Faintly to the laboratory came a familiar chant, which Hale recognized as Aña’s death song.

Dust to dust  
Mind to Mind—  
He will shed his body  
As the green snake sheds his skin.

As Hale watched, the struggling Indian's body seemed to shrink, and then, instantly, it disappeared.

"Watch them scatter the dust!" said the scientist.

One of the Indians stooped and blew upon the grass.

"What have you done!" Hale gasped. "You've killed this one. Oh, I see now! These poor devils are totally ignorant that you are killing them for practice. They worship you while you turn them to—silver dust!" He turned angrily on the scientist as though he longed to strike him.

"Keep cool, young man!" Sir Basil held up his fleshless hand. "There is no death! Change, yes; but no permanent blotting out of consciousness. Can't you see the horror of it as nature works? When your time for release comes, as it inevitably will, your mind-electron might find new enslavement in a worm!"

Hale's reply came hotly. "If that is true, why do you murder these poor devils deliberately!"

“My dear Oakham, perhaps you are not so brilliant as I had hoped! All that I have done thus far is only child’s play, in preparation for my real work. Haven’t you guessed by now what I am getting ready to do?”

“No; I’m a poor guesser.”

The scientist made a gesture of mock despair. “Then let me tell you. The molecule-disintegrator is active only on organic structures. When I concentrate it so”—he reached out again, sighted the projector on some point beyond the window and pressed a button —“one single living organism passes out. See that jupati tree by the rock disappear?”

Before Hale’s eyes, the tall, slender tree melted into air.

“But,” continued Sir Basil, “if I should *broadcast* my molecule-disintegrator on electron magnetic waves, destruction would pass out in all directions, following the curve of the earth’s surface, penetrating earth, air, water.” He wet his lips carefully. “You understand?”

Hale stiffened suddenly. "I understand. No life could survive these vibrations of destruction? Through every corner of the earth where life lurks, they would reach?"

"Yes!" cried Sir Basil. "There would be not a blade of grass, not a living spore, not a hidden egg! Think of it, Oakham! No more would the clean air and the sweet earth reek with life, and at last the ultimate mind-electron would be released forever."

He was breathing fast, and his emaciated face burned with two red spots.

Hale thought rapidly. He was convinced now that the fate of all life lay within that diabolical network of chemical apparatus.

At last he said: "And what of you and I, Sir Basil? Shall we, too, be caught in this wholesale destruction?"

"Not immediately," replied the scientist. "Of course, I want to remain in the flesh long enough to be sure

that my purpose has been accomplished. I have provided a way for my own safety. If you desire, you may remain with me.” He smiled craftily. “I have planned to keep Aña also, the woman whom I called into life and made as I wished.”

His words pounded against Hale’s tortured ears with almost physical force. With a supreme effort, the young man controlled his rage and despair. Aña needed him too much now for him to risk defeat by showing his emotions.

To Sir Basil he said: “But if all life disappears from the earth, what shall we do for food—you, Aña, and I?”

Sir Basil lifted his brows. “You don’t think I overlooked that, do you? What is food? Various combinations of the basic elements. I who have conquered the atom need never worry about starving to death.”

All this time, the machinery had been humming, and now the humming changed its note to a shrill whistle.

Sir Basil went to the eye-piece and looked into it. Opening a door in the machinery, he disappeared inside. He came out soon, flushed and evidently elated.

“Bring the stretcher, Oakham,” he ordered.

Hale brought the stretcher, placing it close to the machine. Then Sir Basil opened a metal door and gently eased out a human body.

It was Unani Assu, unconscious but alive and breathing. Hale, helping the scientist to get the man on the stretcher, noticed that the crushed legs were perfectly healed. Together they bore him to a long seat. The Indian’s eyes were still closed, but his even breathing indicated that he was only sleeping.

Suddenly Hale pointed a finger and cried out. “My God, Sir Basil, look at his hands and feet!”

Unani Assu, still lying like a recumbent bronze statue sculptured by a master, was perfect from shoulder to wrist, from thigh to ankle. But, somewhere in that



diabolical machine through which he had passed, his hands and feet had undergone a hideous metamorphosis which had transformed them from the well-formed extremities of a splendid young Indian into the hairy paws of a giant rat!

Hale turned away his head, sick with disgust.

Sir Basil cut the silence triumphantly:

“Now he’ll never again face Aña with love in his eyes!”

“What!” broke in Hale. “Did you plan this monstrous thing?”

“Of course! I told you I should forever cure him of his mad infatuation.”

“But why didn’t you kill him, as you killed the others? It would have been the most merciful way.”

Sir Basil showed his teeth in his ugly smile. “A creator is never merciful.”

A quiver passed through the Indian's body and presently, he sighed deeply and opened his eyes. He seemed dazed, puzzled. He looked from Hale to the scientist, and turned seeking eyes to other parts of the laboratory.

"Aña!" he called weakly. "Where is Aña?"

He pulled himself a little unsteadily to his feet—to the spatulated, hairy *rodent* feet that had come out of the life-machine. Staggering, he would have fallen, had he not thrown out his arm to steady himself. Instinctively he tried to grasp something for support, and then, for the first time, he discovered his deformity.

Hale was never to forget that expression of horror and disgust that swept over the Indian's face as he spread open his revolting extremities and stared at them.

A sudden, wild roar of despair rang through the room. "Aimu! My hands!"

The scientist smiled with evident amusement. "You are a grotesque sight, Unani Assu. Do you want to see Aña now?"

The fright and horror faded from the Indian's face, for now he glared with hate into the mad, mocking eyes.

"You did it!" the Indian ground out. "You've made me into a thing from which Aña will run screaming."

Through the quiet rage of the perfectly spoken English ran a thread of sorrow. "Aimu, whom we considered too holy to name!"

Choking, he hobbled away to the door, which he unbolted. As he passed out into the open, Sir Basil went over to the machine and began sighting the projector which cast forth the ray of destruction.

"No!" cried Hale. "You've done enough murder for to-day."

The scientist paused. "I was trying to be merciful. And then, I wonder if it is safe to let him go, hating me?"

Oh, well!" He shrugged his narrow shoulders. "I seldom leave the laboratory, and certainly nothing can harm me here." He touched the death-projector significantly.

Hale made a mental decision. "I must find out how the damned thing works and put it out of commission."

With this determination uppermost in his mind, he assumed a more intense interest in the strange laboratory. For the next two days, he assisted Sir Basil so assiduously that he learned much about the operation of the life-machine. And gradually he stopped being horrified as the fascination of producing life in the laboratory grew upon him.

After he had assisted the scientist in building living organisms from basic elements, he ceased to cringe when he remembered that perhaps it was true that Aña was created in the mysterious life-machine.

Once the scientist declared, “She is untainted with inheritance. She is the perfect mate that I called into life so that before I pass from the flesh I may taste that one human emotion I’ve never experienced—love.”

That very night Hale kept a secret tryst with Aña after the village slept. Sweet, virginal Aña, who knew less of the world than a civilized child of twelve—what a sensation she would create in New York with her beauty, her culture, her natural fascination! With her in his arms and an orange tropical moon hanging low in the hot, black sky, he ceased to care that she had no ancestors, for now his one passionate desire was to save her from Sir Basil and to hold her forever for himself.

He might have been content to go on like this for months, tampering with creation in the day time, courting Aña in secret at night, had not Unani Assu come back for revenge.

On the fourth night after Unani Assu had disappeared into the jungle, Hale went to the *igarapé* to meet Aña.

He had gone only half the distance when he encountered her, running frantically up the path toward him.

“Hale!” she gasped, falling into his opened arms, where she lay panting and exhausted.

Hale gently patted the long braids, shimmering in silver tangles under the moonlight, and, crushing the soft little trembling body close, he murmured:

“What’s the matter, darling?”

She dug her face deeper into the bend of his arm.

“Oh, Hale! I saw Unani Assu a few minutes ago.” For several moments she was unable to go on, for sudden sobs cut off her breath. “It’s terrible, Hale, what Aimu did to his hands and feet, but what Unani’s going to do to Aimu is still more terrible.”

Hale placed his hand gently under her chin and tilted up her small, pale, tear-drenched face.

“Be calm, Aña, and tell me plainly.”

Still clinging to him, she went on. "He told me that Aimu is a devil, Hale. He showed me his hands and asked me if I could ever get used to them and be—his squaw." The round gold breastplates and the necklace of painted seeds clinked together over her panting bosom. "I told him about you, Hale. And then he seemed to go mad. He said he'd kill Aimu to-night."

"But, Aña! Why did he let you go, knowing that you would give the alarm?"

"He didn't let me go." Her petaled lips parted in a faint smile. "I escaped. Unani Assu tied me to a tree by the *igarapé*. Because he doesn't ... hate me, he could not bear to tie me too tightly."

"Then he must be close to the laboratory now. If he breaks in upon Aimu—oh, my God!"

Hale remembered the death-projector. If Sir Basil were in danger of attack, he would not hesitate to touch the 307 waiting button that would broadcast death throughout the world.

He seized Aña's little hand and cried out: "Run, Aña! The only safe place now is Aimu's laboratory. Run!"

As they dashed on madly, Hale opened wide his nostrils to scent the heavy, flower-laden air of the jungle. Any moment all this sweet, rich life might vanish instantly. He had a horrible vision of a world devoid of life, a world of bare rocks, dry sand, odorless, dead waters. For it was life that greened the landscape, roughened the stones with moss and lichen, thickened the ocean with ooze, and turned the dry sand into loam—life that swarmed underfoot, overhead, all around!

And now, just as they reached the laboratory door, panting and frantic, a hoarse shriek broke forth. Dragging Aña after him, Hale dashed forward, conscious of two masculine voices raised in passion.

The door to the room where the life-machine performed its vile work was locked. Hale pounded against it and called out to Sir Basil, but only curses and the sound of tumbling bodies came from beyond the door. Although originally the door had been thick



and strong, the destructive forces of the tropics had pitted and rotted the wood. A few blows of Hale's shoulder broke it down.

Under the brilliant electric light, Sir Basil and Unani Assu were fighting upon the blood-spattered floor. The struggle was uneven: the scientist's emaciated body was no match for the splendid strength of the young Indian.

"Help Aimu!" cried Aña, pushing Hale forward.

Aimu was being choked to death.

Hale acted fantastically but efficiently. Catching up a bottle of ammonia, he moistened a handkerchief and clapped it against Unani Assu's nose. Instantly the Indian choked, released Sir Basil, and fell back, gasping for breath.

Hale thrust the handkerchief into his pocket.

"Get out!" he ordered Unani Assu. "Quick!" He threatened him with the ammonia bottle.

But Unani Assu was not looking at the bottle. “Aimu!” he screamed, pointing.

When Hale saw and understood, he leaped across the room to plant his body in front of Aña; for Sir Basil was behind the life-machine, reaching for the controls of the ray projector.

Suddenly, from behind Hale, a silver streak shot across the room. Sir Basil groaned and sank to the floor of the laboratory.

A keen-bladed dissecting knife, thrown by Aña, stuck out from his left breast.

Aña ran forward, sobbing wildly. “Oh, Aimu! I’m sorry! I didn’t mean for it to strike you there. Only your hand, Aimu! I didn’t want Hale to die, Aimu. I didn’t—oh!”

She was on her knees by the scientist’s side, his head held in her slender arms.

“He’s breathing!” she rejoiced. “Some *masata*, Hale, quick!”

Hale found a bottle of good brandy which he had contributed from his own supplies. Soon Sir Basil gasped and opened his eyes. He stared about him wildly, then gasped:

“I’m dying, Hale Oakham! Quick, the life-machine, before my mind-electron escapes.”

He tried to pull his body up, but fell back, weak and panting.

Hale hesitated, looking doubtfully at Aña.

“For God’s sake, quick!” screamed Sir Basil. “I’m dying, I say! I must have—rebirth. Lift me to the disintegrator. Hurry!...” His voice trailed off faintly.

“He is dying,” snapped Hale. “We might as well try it.” He jerked open the door to the disintegrator. “Here, Unani Assu! Lend a hand!”

Instantly the Indian came forward, a peculiar, pleased expression on his handsome face. In a moment, Sir Basil's body was inside, and the machine began its weird humming, the humming that indicated the transformation of a human body into dust.

"Now!" cried Unani Assu exultingly, going behind the machine. "I have helped him enough to understand that if one changes this—and this—and this"—he made some rapid adjustments on the machine—"something that is not pleasant will happen."

"Stop!" cried Hale. "What did you change?"

The Indian laughed mockingly. "Wouldn't you like to know? But, yet, you should not worry. You have no cause to love him, have you?"

"I can't be a traitor, Unani Assu! Arrange the machine as it was originally, and I give you my word of honor that when Sir Basil comes out, I'll wreck the damned thing beyond repair. See, Unani Assu? You and I together will smash it."

The Indian folded his arms so that the repulsive things that should have been hands were hidden.

“It’s too late now,” he admitted, shaking his head.  
“Yet I’ve done no more to him than he did to me.”

Hale went to the eye-piece in the machine and started to look inside. Unani Assu stepped forward, tapped him on the shoulder, and, fingering significantly the dissecting knife which he had picked up, said:

“I am operating the machine. Will you sit over there by Aña and wait? It won’t be long. And, white stranger, remember this: I am your friend. I am turned against none but our common enemy.” He pointed significantly to the machine.

Two hours passed, long, silent hours for the watchers in the laboratory. Aña fell asleep, in a sweet, childish bundle upon the piled cushions, her golden hair, still decorated with the red flowers which she always wore, crushed and withered now. Several times Hale caught Unani Assu gazing at her sadly, and his own

look saddened when it rested on the Indian's strong, outraged body.

The humming of the machine changed to a whistle. Placing his fingers on his lips in a signal of quiet, Unani Assu whispered:

“Let Aña sleep. She mustn't see this.”

Opening a door in the machine, his handsome face lighted with a grim smile, he whispered exultingly:

“Watch!”

A scuttling sound issued forth and then, half drunkenly, an enormous rat tumbled out—one of those horrible rats with the hairless, humanlike faces that had so frequently come from the life-machine.

Hale could not crush back the cry that issued from his throat.

“Where is Sir Basil?” he gasped.

“There!” cried the Indian, pointing to the kicking rat, which was fast gaining strength.

Hale staggered back. “No! You don’t mean it, do you?”

Unani Assu turned the rat over with a contemptuous toe. “Yes, I mean it. Behold Aimu, the man who thought himself creator and destroyer—the man who said that a human being was no higher than a rat! Perhaps he was right, for see this thing that was once a man!”

Hale buried his face in his hands. “Kill it, Unani Assu! Kill it!”

Unani Assu’s low laugh was metallic. “You kill it.”

Hale uncovered his face. “Open the disintegrator.” Gingerly he reached for the rat’s tail.

But his hand never touched the animal. The hairless face turned for a second, and the little, beady eyes blinked up at Hale with an expression that his fevered

imagination thought almost human. Then, like a dark shadow, the rat dashed away. Once around the room it scampered, hunting for an exit. Hale started in pursuit. He was almost upon the animal again, when, leaping up from his grasp, it landed on a low shelf where chemicals were stored. Several bottles fell, filling the room with fumes.

Another bottle fell, and, suddenly, amid a thunderous roar, the ceiling and walls began falling. Some highly explosive chemical had been stored in one of the bottles.

Hale was thrown violently against the couch. His hand touched Aña's body. One last shred of consciousness enabled him to pick her up and drag her out. In the open, he fell, aware, before blackness descended, that flames leaped high over the laboratory building and that Unani Assu lay dead within.

Hale and Aña, leaning over the deck-rail of a small steam launch, gazed into the dark waters of the Amazon.



“We ought to reach Para by morning,” said Hale, “and then, dearest, we’re off for New York!”

Aña, wearing one of the first civilized dresses she had ever donned, and looking as smart as any débutante, slipped her little hand into her husband’s.

“Isn’t it a shame, Hale,” she moaned, “that the fire burned all the animals and insects, the machinery, and even your notes?” Her beautiful face saddened. “Just one or two specimens might have been proof enough for your What-You-Call-It Club!”

“The Nescience Club, darling. No, I can’t expect to win the Woolman prize, but I’ve won a prize worth far more.” He squeezed her little hand and looked devotedly into her blue eyes. “And, Aña, I’ve reasoned out something concerning mind-electrons which even Sir Basil overlooked.”

“What is it, Hale?”

“He maintained that matter seeks always to enslave mind-electrons, but I am convinced that mind-

electrons seek to enslave matter. Understand? It's creation, Aña! Had Sir Basil succeeded in broadcasting death throughout the world, the freed mind-electrons, as in the beginning, would have started again to vitalize inorganic atoms. And, in a few million years, which is no time to the Mind, the world would be humming with a new civilization. Large thought, eh, sweetheart?"